

Study Outline – A Dialogue on Conscience (See Thomas More Source Book, pp. 316-35)

1. Alington's Letter Presenting Lord Chancellor Audley's Criticisms of More:

- (1) Being obstinate in acting overly wise and in desiring to rule in his own way (317)
- (2) Acting as a scrupulous ass (317-18)

2. The Dialogue Between Daughter Meg and Sir Thomas: Part I

- Setting and intro: How and when Margaret presents these criticisms to her father (318-19)
- More's first response, beginning with his first calling Meg "Eve" (320)
- Meg summarizes Audley's criticisms; gives the letter to More, who reads it twice carefully (320-21)
- More's comments on his daughter Alington (321m)
- More's comments on his "exceptionally good lord" (Audley) and his "good master" (Cromwell) (321b)
- More's cheerful answer to Audley's fables "cheerfully told" (322)
 - First fable, about wise men ruling fools who have been in the rain:
 - The fable's origin and history: Wolsey (322)
 - What More "will not dispute": Wolsey's interpretation and use of this fable (322-23)
 - What More does dispute: that the wise were actually wise (323 – 1 paragraph)
 - What More cannot guess: whom Audley takes for wise (323 – 2 paragraph)
 - What More is sure of: he is a fool; he never desired to rule (323b)
 - Stresses twice the need to rule oneself, quoting Boethius' *Consolation of Phil* (324)
 - Second fable, about the scrupulous ass:
 - Why it is not Aesop's (324 – 1 short paragraph)
 - What is too subtle for More: whom the lion and the wolf represent! (324m)
 - At end of par., note apparent contradiction between supposition and belief
 - Argues that he doesn't rely on his mind alone (325 – 1 paragraph)
 - Lists reasons why he can't trust anyone living (325)
 - Tells **story of Company** (325-27)
 - More applies this story to his situation (327-28)
- Meg's response: conform not for fellowship but conform to consciences of the good, esp. since it involves law made by Parliament (328)

3. The Dialogue: Part II

- More: Praises Margaret for "not doing a bad job" (328b). He then takes up when and why one should conform one's conscience to laws or truths with which one may disagree.
 - Distinguishes law of one land from law of "CC lawfully gathered together in a Gen. Coun" (329)
 - Gives example of a law in dispute, other than a law made "by a General Council of the Church or by general faith grown...throughout all Christian nations" (329)
 - Gives example of a dispute among the learned (329-30)
 - On the need to conform one's conscience to
 - a "determination" of "a well-assembled General Council" (330)
 - "an evident truth appearing by the common faith of Christendom" (330)
 - Why he refuses the oath: he will not tell (330b)
 - What he will not dispute about others' change of mind (331)
 - What opinion he "will not conceive" of those who changed their mind (331)
 - [Compare this listing of reasons with the one on page 325.]
 - The issue of numbers: many are on his side (332)
 - He is sure of his own conscience, but will not tell her everything (332)
 - [See page 354 for when More does reveal his conscience.]
- Meg: Responds by looking sad (332b)
- More: Questions "mother Eve" (333t)
- Meg: Gives the "Master Harry argument" and makes it her own (333)
- More: Laughs and invokes Eve again (333)
- Meg: Recalls Cromwell's warning of what Parliament can still do (333)
- More: Recounts what "he had not failed to think about"; repeats his riddle (333-34; cp. 213, 348)
- Meg: Warns of being "too late" (334)
- More: Why More wishes never to change; what he would do if he does (334-35)

4. Concluding Paragraph (335)